

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE SECRETARY

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MEMORANDUM

April 20, 1954

For: CIA - Mr. Dulles

In accordance with the discussion this morning at the IAC, I send along herewith the recent Intelligence Note on the subject of Ho Chi Minh.

Document No. 49
Review of this document by CIA has determined that

- ☐ CIA has no objection to declass
☐ It contains information of CIA interest that must remain classified at TS S (C)
Authority: HR 10-2

☐ It contains nothing of CIA interest
Date 27 Feb 84 Reviewer

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Fisher Howe
Deputy

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Attachment:
Copy of Confidential
April 9 memo to the
Under Secretary.

State Department review completed

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CONFIDENTIAL

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April 9, 1954

MEMORANDUM

To: The Under Secretary
Through: S/S
Subject: Intelligence Note: Is Ho Chi Minh Alive?

There is no firm evidence available either to the Department, to CIA, or to G-2, that Ho Chi Minh is alive or dead. Most of the information on this question is either from Communist propaganda or from French intelligence channels. On balance, this information suggests that Ho is still alive.

Ho Chi Minh would now be in his early sixties. In 1919, he appealed to the Peace Conference at Versailles for "freedom and justice for the peoples of Indochina"; in 1920-21, he participated in the founding of the French Communist Party; in 1925, after two or more years study in Russia, he went to China with Borodin; in 1930, under the name Nguyen Ai Quoc he founded the Indochinese Communist Party and acted as the key Comintern agent in Southeast Asia; in July-September 1946, as President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), he negotiated personally in France with the then Prime Minister Bidault and Overseas Minister Moutet.

The frequent reports of Ho's death would appear to have acquired credibility primarily because no reliable source has seen Ho since May 1947 when he was reported to be sick with tuberculosis. However, voice recordings and a photograph allegedly made in 1952 are similar to known recordings and photographs of Ho made in 1946.

Joseph Starobin, of the New York Daily Worker, claims to have met Ho "somewhere in Free Vietnam" in March 1953. He described him as "a rather tall man, 63 years of age... His back is now slightly hunched; greying hair recedes from a broad forehead and piercing eyes look out over high cheekbones... Later that evening, when he made his way down the steep stairs, he insisted that he needed no help."

The position occupied by Ho Chi Minh in the hierarchy of power in the Viet Minh regime may have shifted in recent years. At times, Ho Chi Minh appears in DRV propaganda to be relegated to the benign role of "Uncle Ho" or "the Old Father" (his popular names), who spends his waning years writing verses to his "beloved children." This propaganda treatment would suggest that Ho has relinquished some or even most of his powers to new leaders, possibly as a result of old age or ill health.

On the other hand, public communications between the DRV and other Communist regimes have been carried on in the name of Ho Chi Minh, and Ho's name has consistently been identified with the most important decisions of the regime.

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Even if Ho Chi Minh is dead or is now merely a figurehead, his name continues to be an important asset to the Communists. Despite the growing identification of, and opposition to, Ho as an orthodox Communist, his name has considerable prestige throughout Asia as a symbol of national independence in Indochina.

A similar memorandum has been sent to the Secretary.

W. Park Armstrong, Jr.

cc: C
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S/P
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